

Stacy Moreno has been selected as the 2015 Southwest Maricopa First Things First Champion for Young Children.

The award is given to local champions who actively volunteer their time to raise public awareness of the importance of early childhood development and health. Champions spend a significant amount of time volunteering with FTF and building public awareness about the importance of early childhood issues.

The awareness-raising efforts Moreno has demonstrated include:

- Created a personal networking group in which she sends group email updates about events occurring in the area or special needs, including FTF events.
- Recruited 107 new FTF friends through her classes.
- Invited FTF to provide Early Childhood Every trainings.
- Built networking events and speakers bureau where FTF was a member of the panels and tabled the event.



We recently caught up with Moreno who is a professor of Social Work at Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale.

Question: Why do you feel early childhood development and health is so important?

Answer: Rapid development happens in the first few years of life, and you can't turn back the clock. Children who have the best foot forward from the door have better chances at succeeding long term. They are vulnerable and need champions in their corner! If I weren't around to protect my children, I would want others to step up to the plate. They deserve our attention.

Q: What caused you to get involved in efforts to increase public awareness of early childhood issues?

A: I recognized that it was a cause worth fighting for, and it surprised me that in the circle of human services it was not as necessary to make others aware as it was with the general public. It isn't something we need to covet and keep to ourselves. Children won't reap the benefits if families and communities don't know about its existence and aren't educated about the reasons why early childhood education and health is so important.

Q: Why do you feel building awareness in early childhood and developmental health is so important for families and communities?

A: Children ARE our future. Period. We can't truly believe that we will have a top education system, dominate healthcare, develop top notch leaders if we aren't worth investing in children when they are young and able to learn and grow with our nurturing.

Q: How have you seen awareness for the early years change in your community?

A: I see more activities in the community, more assistance for families, more resources for parents to be successful, programs for arts and language for children reaching out beyond traditional settings, more in-home programs to support the family and child be successful.

Q: How do you suggest other people in your community get involved?

A: I would love to see community members sharing the information in their close knit groups. We should have one champion per square mile! Schools and families should have local people that connect directly to the countywide support teams. Local voices get to know the needs of the communities and will be able to get more families to take action, and rise up to lead causes.

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About First Things First – First Things First is a voter-created, statewide organization that funds early education and health programs to help kids be successful once they enter kindergarten. Decisions about how those funds are spent are made by local councils staffed by community volunteers. To learn more, visit azftf.gov.